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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 003766

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [AG](#) [WS](#) [MO](#) [TS](#) [FR](#)

SUBJECT: MFA ON ALGERIAN RELATIONS WITH FRANCE AND MOROCCO,
WESTERN SAHARA, AND TUNISIAN HUMAN RIGHTS

Classified By: Acting Political Minister-Counselor Paul Mailhot, reason
s 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. Summary: MFA DAS-equivalent for the Maghreb Anne Mohsen, during a recent meeting with us, described French relations with Algeria as unaffected by controversy over the 1945 Setif massacre, with progress on track towards conclusion of a bilateral friendship treaty by year-end. Mohsen suggested Algeria was more to blame for lack of progress in Moroccan-Algerian rapprochement, a continued GoF priority, and described Algiers as less hurried and less economically pressed than Morocco. Mohsen confirmed continued French reserve on prospects for progress on the Western Sahara and noted that the GoF had sought to "calm down" the Spanish government from pressing too hard for a replacement for Western Sahara SRSG de Soto, for whom France has no preferred candidate. Mohsen expressed GoF concern over the deteriorating human rights situation in Tunisia and its potential to undermine Tunisian stability, especially with the WSIS approaching. Though France has not demarched the GOT or issued public statements on recent human rights cases, Mohsen confirmed that the GoF was reflecting on its human rights approach to Tunisia and asked us for recent USG public statements on the issue. End summary.

ALGERIA

2. (C) During a recent meeting with poloff, MFA DAS-equivalent for the Maghreb Anne Mohsen described French bilateral relations with Algeria as unharmed by recent controversy over the commemoration of the 1945 Setif massacres, and downplayed Algerian government statements comparing French colonial authorities' behavior during that period to that of the Nazis. Mohsen said the GoF viewed the Setif issue as driven by internal dynamics in Algeria, and had successfully avoided being drawn into a public polemic on the issue. She added that one of the most inflammatory GOA statements, attributed in the press to Bouteflika, had been made in his name by another minister. She noted that Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Renaud Muselier had been received warmly in Algiers by Algerian FM Bejdaoui and the new Prime Minister during a May 10-13 visit, amid Algerian press controversy over Setif. Mohsen summed up that despite the controversy, the GoF and GoA were on track to conclude a landmark "friendship treaty" by year-end 2005, which will mark a historic advance in the long-troubled relations between Paris and Algiers.

3. (C) Mohsen reaffirmed that the GoF continued to press for Algerian-Moroccan rapprochement at every opportunity. She blamed Algeria more than Morocco for lack of progress, and described the GOA as less hurried than Morocco, economically comfortable with high oil prices, and voicing increasingly dogmatic positions on Western Sahara. The Moroccans viewed new Algerian FM Bejdaoui as a longtime proponent of doctrinaire Algerian views on Western Sahara, and it remained to be seen whether Algeria was willing to be more pragmatic on the issue.

WESTERN SAHARA

4. (C) On Western Sahara developments, Mohsen reported that the GoF was seeking to calm down the Spanish, who were being overly eager in seeking a replacement for former SRSG for Western Sahara Alvaro de Soto. The GoF had counseled the Spanish that rather than focusing on the personality of the next SRSG, we needed to focus collectively on creating the conditions conducive to a political solution and continue to encourage Algerian-Moroccan rapprochement, through moves such as reopening the border. The French approach on Western Sahara, she quipped, was less exciting and much slower than what Spain was seeking, but in the end, had far greater potential to bear fruit. Mohsen reported that the GoF had no preferred candidates to replace de Soto and did not want to rush the UN Secretariat to make a decision; nor did it want to leave a long void either. Mohsen added that the UN Secretariat should consult in advance to ensure its choice is

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acceptable to the parties, and to the U.S., France, and Spain. On a cautionary note, she observed that the next SRSG

could not expect to revive the Baker Plan, which remained a non-starter for GOM.

TUNISIA

15. (C) In response to poloff's raising U.S. concerns on the human rights situation in Tunisia, Mohsen affirmed that the GoF remained very concerned about Tunisia's deteriorating internal political situation and increased economic vulnerability. She observed that the GoF saw no sign of Tunisia making any progress as the World Summit for the Information Society (WSIS) approaches; instead, political repression was increasing and earlier consideration for procedural trial norms had been abandoned. All of these factors, she concluded, had the potential to undermine Tunisian stability. Mohsen confirmed that the GoF had prepared press guidance on the Abbou lawyer case and that of other lawyers arrested by the GOT, but because no reporters had posed the question, the GoF had not issued any public statements of concern on the issue. Mohsen confirmed that that GoF had not demarched the GOT about the Abbou case or other recent human rights issues. She stressed, however, that EU members (including the presidency, EC, France, Germany, UK) had sent representatives to witness the Abbou trial, which in itself sent a message to the GOT.

16. (C) Mohsen expressed interest in to what degree U.S. officials had raised human rights concerns with Tunisian officials and at what level such approaches were made. Poloff confirmed that the USG had made multiple, high-level approaches to the GOT on human rights issues in Tunis and Washington, and that human rights topped the agenda at the highest level U.S.-GOT encounters, including the Ben Ali visit to Washington in early 2004. Mohsen reported that, especially with the WSIS approaching, the GoF was reflecting on how best to encourage improvements in Tunisia's internal situation and what approach would be most effective in generating a constructive response. She noted that the GOT only seemed to be hardening its approach in response to appeals, such as that made to Ben Ali by the visiting European Parliament President, for Tunisia to deblock EU aid to the Tunisian League for Human Rights (LIDH). Mohsen said it would be useful for her to have texts of recent U.S. statements on Tunisia. Poloff provided Mohsen with the French-language version of the 2004 Country Human Rights Report on Tunisia, the May 5 Department spokesperson's statement on recent lawyer arrests in Tunisia, and the Tunisia excerpt of the "Supporting Human Rights and Democracy" report.

COMMENT

17. (C) Comment: Although Mohsen will depart her current position at the end of June, we would like to continue dialogue with her successor, French Embassy in Beirut DCM Christian Testot, on human rights in the Maghreb countries, and seek to encourage the GoF to be more forthright in raising these issues with the GOT, in line with the private concerns on Tunisia's human rights situation which we have long heard from MFA and Elysee officials. We would appreciate additional points which Washington might provide to encourage France and/or other EU members to adopt a more active stance in articulating human rights concerns to the Tunisian government. There would be similar utility in encouraging the GoF to take a more active approach in raising human rights concerns in Algeria, to parallel U.S. messages to the GOA. End comment.
WOLFF